

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ORM-01 SR-02 AID-05 IO-10 SSO-00 NSCE-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07

L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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O P 061300Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8818

INFO CINCPAC HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITU

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 341

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, CB

SUBJECT: SIXTH DAY OF KC DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE

REF: PHNOM PENH 0252

1. SUMMARY. HEAVY FIGHTING CONTINUED IN THE 7TH DIVISION AREA NORTH OF PHNOM PENH, BUT FANK POSITIONS THERE ARE HOLDING. THE ENEMY FIRED A LARGE NUMBER OF ROCKETS AGAINST POCHENTONG AIRBASE, CAUSING NO DAMAGE. THE SITUATION ALONG ROUTE 1 AND THE MEKONG SOUTH OF PHNOM PENH CONTINUES TO BE OF CONCERN AS ANOTHER FRIENDLY NAVAL FIRE SUPPORT BASE FELL. OVERALL, THE MILITARY SITUATION REMAINS MANAGEABLE, BUT SEVERAL PROBLEM AREAS COULD DEVELOP IF THE KC CAN SUSTAIN THEIR OFFENSIVE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE 7TH DIVISION'S BASE CAMP REMAINS ENCIRCLED AS FANK REINFORCEMENTS HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO LINK UP YET. THE ENEMY IS WELL DUG IN, DIVISION POSITIONS ARE TAKING HEAVY FIRE, BUT ARE HOLDING. THE ROAD INTO THE DIVISION
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LOGISTICS CAMP IS PASSABLE BUT TENUOUS. ESTIMATES OF

REFUGEES CREATED IN THIS AREAS AS A RESULT OF THE FIGHTING NOW GO AS HIGH AS 20,000, XDOT GKR AND VOLUNTARY AGENCY OFFICIALS ARE ON THE SCENE AND PROVIDING ASSISTANCE.

3. THE SITUATION ON THE MEKONG'S EAST BANK OPPOSITE PHNOM PENH AND ALONG ROUTE 61 TO THE NORTHEAST REMAINED BASICALLY UNCHANGED. SIX ROCKETS WERE REPORTED IMPACTING IN THE RIVER ON THE MORNING OF JAN6.

4. ANOTHER FRIENDLY NAVAL FIRE SUPPORT BASE ON THE LOWER MEKONG FELL TO THE ENEMY ON JAN 6. CASUALTIES ARE UNKNOWN. ROUTE 1 PARALLELING THE RIVER REMAINS CUT BY THE KC AND THE MORALE OF THE FANK 36TH BRIGADE IN THAT AREA IS LOW. HOWEVER, A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF SOLDIERS OF ONE OF THE BRIGADE'S BATTALIONS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED AS DESTROYED (SEE REFTTEL) HAVE NOW REPORTEDLY MANAGED TO MAKE THEIR WAY BACK TO FRIENDLY TERRITORY.

5. THE KC, DURING THE EARLY MORNING HOURS OF JAN 6, FIRED BETWEEN TWENTY-FIVE TO FORTY 107MM ROCKETS AGAINST POCHENTONG AIRFIELD, ALL OF WHICH FELL SHORT, CAUSING NO DAMAGE. SINCE JAN 3, THE MAIN FANK AMMUNITION DEPOT IN THE SAME GENERAL AREA HAS RECEIVED ABOUT 10 ROUNDS OF ROCKET FIRE, ALSO WITHOUT CAUSING DAMAGE. IN THE 3RD DIVISION AREA SOUTHWEST OF THE CAPITAL, HEAVY ENEMY CASUALTIES HAVE BEEN REPORTED, PARTICULARLY AS A RESULT OF AN ARMORED CAR SWEEP OPERATION RESULTING IN OVER 200 KILLED IN GROUND ACTION AND THROUGH SUPPORTING AIR STRIKES.

6. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH FANK IS ACQUITTING ITSELF BY AND LARGE IN CREDITABLE FASHION, AND THE SITUATION FOR THE MOMENT IS NOT CRITICAL, WE WISH TO FLAG SEVERAL POTENTIAL PROBLEM AREAS WHICH COULD ARISE AS THE KC OFFENSIVE RUNS ITS COURSE. (A) THERE ARE, WE BELIEVE, SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS OF KC TROOPS THAT HAVE NOT YET BEEN COMMITTED. FANK IS STRETCHED THIN, AND THE PRESENT MANAGEABLE SITUATION AROUND THE CAPITAL COULD CHANGE IF THESE ADDITIONAL ENEMY FORCES ENTER THE FRAY, ALTERNATIVELY, SHOULD THESE TROOPS BE DIRECTED AGAINST ONR OR MORE

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PROVINCIAL CAPITALS, FANK'S ABILITY TO REDEPLOY ITS TROOPS, TO DATE QUITE EFFECTIVE, COULD BE SEVERELY TAXED. TO COUNTERBALANCE THIS, WE BELIEVE THE ENEMY HAS BEEN HURT BADLY SINCE JANUARY 1, ALTHOUGH WE ARE UNABLE AS YET TO QUANTIFY HIS LOSSES. (B) THE LOWER MEKONG CANNOT NOW BE USED BY CONVOYS COMING TO PHNOM PENH FROM SOUTH VIETNAM WITHOUT SERIOUS RISK. ALTHOUGH STOCKS OF AMMUNITION, POL AND RICE IN PHNOM PENH ARE NOW AT

ACCEPTABLE LEVELS AND THERE IS NO IMMEDIATE CRISIS,
SHOULD FANK REMAIN TIED DOWN AROUND PHNOM PENH AND THUS
UNABLE TO CLEAR THE MEKONG, SOME CRITICAL DECISIONS MAY
HAVE TO BE MADE CONCERNING MEANS OF RESUPPLY. (C) ALTHOUGH
THE ENEMY HAS SUSTAINED HEAVY LOSSES, SO HAS FANK. THE
36TH BRIGADE ON ROUTE 1, WHICH HAS SOME 300 MEN LISTED
AS EITHER KILLED OR MISSING, IS THE MOST DRAMATIC
EXAMPLE. BUT LOSSES ELSEWHERE ARE HEAVY AS WELL. THUS
THE PROBLEM OF FANK'S STAYING POWER MAY COME INTO QUESTION.
WE BELIEVE THE KC CANNOT KEEP UP THEIR PRESENT PACE FOR
LONG, BUT ONLY TIME WILL TELL.
DEAN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AIR COMBAT OPERATIONS, KC, FANK
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 JAN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: greeneet
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975PHNOM00341
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750005-0008
From: PHNOM PENH
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750176/aaaacoka.tel
Line Count: 127
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 PHNOM PENH 0252
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: greeneet
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <07 JUL 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <12 NOV 2003 by greeneet>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SIXTH DAY OF KC DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE
TAGS: MOPS, CB
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006